

## Post-election Analysis

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# QATAR Central Municipal Council elections 22 June 2023

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## Background to the elections<sup>1 2</sup>:

The seventh electoral cycle for Qatar's Central Municipal Council (CMC) was held on June 22, 2023. This was the first CMC election following the inaugural *Shura* Council (SC) legislative elections that took place in October 2021. The main aspect to consider during this process was to discern if the previous electoral process had any impact on the current one. Key questions included potential changes in voter turnout relative to the SC elections and previous CMC elections, and the prospect of women acquiring seats in the new composition.

It is noteworthy that since 2003, Sheikha Al Jufairi has been a CMC member, with Fatima Al Kuwari joining in 2015. They are the only two women who have successfully acquired their seats via the electoral process. Since Al Jufairi was appointed as an SC member in 2021, and Al Kuwari left the CMC to contest in the SC elections (though unsuccessfully), neither of them pursued re-election.

Even though it only possesses local authority, the CMC is a singular national entity, composed of 29 members. These members do not hold executive powers; their role is restricted to advising the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on issues arising between the country's ten municipalities. Despite the Qatari authorities' efforts to promote awareness since the first elections in 1999, citizens' engagement has been somewhat grey, as evidenced by low rates of registration and decreasing voter turnout.

There is no legal framework for parties or political associations in Qatar, thus independent candidates (men and women over 30 years old) submit their nominations to the Ministry of Interior. Like voters, candidates must register in their residing constituency, differently from the SC elections. Every Qatari citizen, both men and women over 18 years old who have held citizenship for more than 15 years, are eligible to vote. Each voter picks one candidate in their single-member district. There are 29 of these districts, where the 29 CMC members are elected by a simple majority (first-past-the-post electoral system). Voting is voluntary, but it requires prior registration on the electoral roll.

The geographical boundaries of the twenty-nine single-member constituencies are decided on the basis of the number of registered voters and do not therefore coincide, neither with the number or the boundaries of the existing ten municipalities nor with the thirty electoral districts defined for the SC elections. The boundaries of the CMC elections districts have been redrawn only once in 2014.

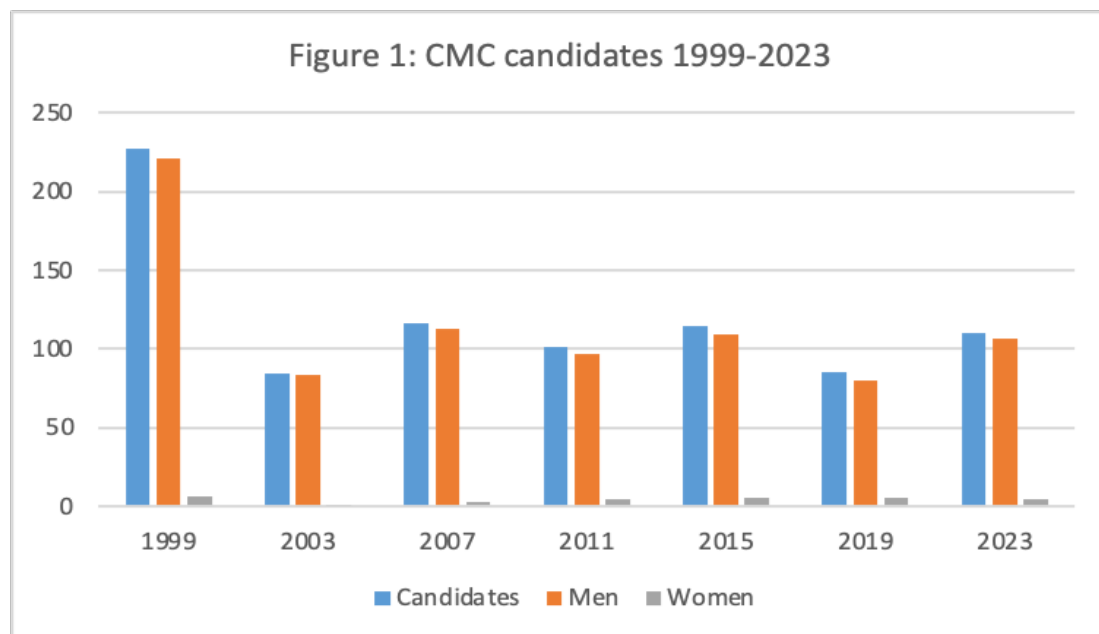
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<sup>1</sup> I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Amna Sadiq from the Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University, for her invaluable advice, assistance, and data contributions to this electoral report.

<sup>2</sup> **All articles published under "Gulf Insights" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University, including the terms and terminology used in this publication.**

## The candidates and the electoral campaign:

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, on this occasion, the electoral body approved 110 candidates, which included four women. This denotes a marginal rise in the total number of candidates when compared with the 85 approved in the 2019 electoral cycle. The figure is above average if we exclude the initial 1999 election, which recorded an exceptional 227 candidates, a number that has remained unmatched in subsequent elections. The participation of female candidates has exhibited a steady pattern since the inaugural elections, with an average of four women running per election cycle, amounting to less than 4% of the total candidate pool.



Source: Ministry of Interior, Elections Department

This CMC election witnessed social media as the primary platform for promoting candidates in the election race, with the almost absence of electoral rallies. Concentrating on social media reflects the relatively high number of youth candidates who aimed to present themselves with a more active communicational strategy, but also with less financial means. There was also a significant lack of newspapers and television overreach for the campaigns compared to the SC elections. Still, most CMC campaigns used remarkably formal language with similar criteria of two items, a short bio and a working program.

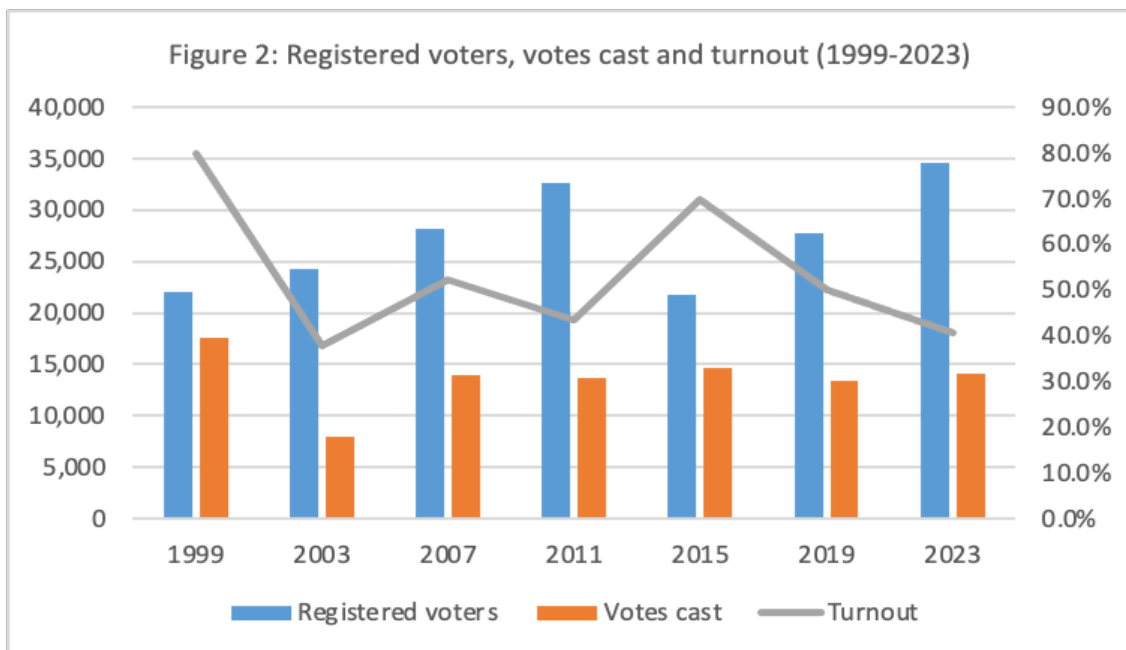
In the social media debates, women and young candidates bragged about bringing new blood to the CMC. Most of their discourse focused on the need for more engaging, proactive CMC members who can offer new perspectives in communal services. Conversely, older candidates and former CMC members discussed the importance of experience in performing an advisory role of the CMC members. Generally, most electoral campaigns showed great understanding from the candidates for the limits of rights given to the CMC.

Governmental officials also held several public appearances regarding the CMC elections encouraging people to participate. QNA [interviewed the Minister of Municipality](#) to highlight the role of the CMC, and the Ministry of Justice also organized a [Legal Symposium](#) on Central Municipal Council Elections.

**The results:**

Ultimately, elections were conducted in 27 out of the 29 districts owing to the absence of competing candidates in the remaining two. As a result, Rashid Al-Kaabi and Nasser al-Kuwari were pronounced winners by default, circumventing the need for elections in districts 27 and 28 respectively.

As per the [official data](#) released by the Ministry of Interior, Elections Department (see Figure 2 below), the number of registered voters for the seventh CMC elections stood at 34,527. This reflects a 24% increase relative to the figure from the 2019 elections. However, the actual votes cast witnessed a mere 5% uptick, with a total of 14,054 voters participating at the polling stations. Consequently, the turnout, calculated based on registered voters, experienced a significant drop, falling from 50.1% to 40.7%. Despite the apparent burgeoning interest among voters and candidates —evident from the increase in candidacy applications and voter registrations— the tangible engagement of Qatari citizens in the electoral process visibly declined.



Source: Ministry of Interior, Elections Department

In this context, two important clarifications deserve to be mentioned. Firstly, there has been no official disclosure regarding the exact count of Qatari citizens who, as per the law, are eligible to register neither for the CMC nor for the SC elections. Secondly, unlike the CMC elections, no official figure encompassing registered voters or votes cast has been publicized to date for the 2021 SC elections. Therefore, comparative analysis is reliant on the extrapolation

of fragmented data that has been disclosed unofficially across various journalistic platforms and social media. Compiling this unofficial information, the rounded figure of approximately 80,000 registered voters for the 2021 SC election appears to more than double any previous figure recorded for CMC elections. Although the 24% surge in voter registration in the latest CMC polls is indeed a positive indication of growing civic interest, it is important to contextualize it against the official turnout rate of 63.5% publicized by the government for the SC elections. This turnout rate, calculated based on registered voters, surpasses the CMC turnout rates by more than 20 percentage points.

### **The new CMC composition**

The newly constituted CMC comprises 12 re-elected incumbents and 3 members who have previously served on the council. Consequently, nearly half the council —14 members— are novel additions to the assembly, mirroring the composition change observed in the 2019 elections. Table 1 below shows the official list of winning candidates, detailing who are the new faces.

Of the four women candidates, none managed to win a seat, leading to a CMC lacking of female representation. This marks a regressive turn, given that there has been a consistent although minimal female presence in the council since 2003, with one elected woman member initially and an increase to two members from 2015.

Owing to the absence of published data, it remains infeasible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of voting patterns or assess the level of support each candidate received within their respective districts.

The relatively large percentage of change in the members expresses the general dissatisfaction with the CMC outcomes. Many opinions expressed in social media and TV programmes during the elections showed a public drive to have a more significant and engaging role for the CMC in dealing with districts' issues. This discourse was translated to bringing new members to the CMC from different professional backgrounds. Another observation is that the 2022 FIFA World Cup has helped many Qatari youths to engage more in public debates. The opportunities of engaging with many different people during the tournament made many Qataris more proactive in public participation and observation. Since then, many youth leaders have gained increased visibility in the public domain through decision-making positions or voluntary work.

Still, one of the defining characteristics of Qatar's electoral landscape is the tribal influence that permeates voting choices and patterns. This influence was especially apparent during the 2021 SC elections following the utilization of the tribal virtual residency as a determinant for electoral district allocation among different tribal members. Although the delineation of districts for the CMC elections adheres to geographical criteria, the voting patterns often reflect tribal or familial allegiances. Despite some pre-election [polls](#) indicating that candidate programs significantly influence voter choice, historical evidence from the CMC elections and comprehensive fieldwork suggest the contrary: voters tend to align their votes with tribal or family preferences, often following familial advice or in

response to personalized outreach from their family's candidate at numerous majlises across Qatar.

This tribal-oriented voting pattern, dating back to the first 1999 elections, has led to a CMC composition where [certain tribal groups' territorial dominance correlates with a higher number of seats](#), like for instance, the Al Marri tribe. Certain sources suggest that the 2014 redrawing of constituencies aimed to marginalize the tribal concentration and provide more unbiased prospects for candidates from different background.

Table 1: Winning candidates, CMC elections 2023

# Dist.	Electoral district	Winning candidate	New
1	Al Jisrah	Jassim Najm Al Khulaifi	
2	Nueva Doha	Jassim Ali Al Srou	New
3	Al Markhiyah	Mohammed Rashed Al Kubaisi	New
4	Khalifeh Norte	Badr Sultan Al Rumaihi	
5	Khalifeh Sur	Mohammed Salem Al Marri	
6	Ibn Imran	Abdulla Ghanem Al Ghanem	New
7	Nueva Al Jadidah	Fahad Abdulla Al Mulla	New
8	Al Hilal	Waleed Mohammed Al Emadi	New
9	Aeropuerto	Hassan Ali Al Ishaq	New
10	al Wakrah	Abdulrahman Abdulla Al Khulaifi	
11	Musay'id	Mohammed Manaa Khuwar	New
12	Abu Hamour	Mohammed Ali Al Athba	
13	Nueva Al Ghanim	Abdulla Mohammed Al Nabet	New
14	Al Murrah	Mohammed Hamoud Al Shafi	
15	Mu'ayzer	Mubarak Fraish Al Salem	
16	Marrikh	Mohammed Saleh Al Hajri	
17	Mu'ayzer norte	Abdulla Khaled Al Yafi	
18	Nueva Al Rayyan	Hamad Khaled Al Kubaisi	
19	Antigua Al Rayyan	Fahad Hamad Al Buraidi	New
20	Al Nasiriyah	Saeed Ali Al Marri	
21	Al Gharafah	Nayef Ali Al Hababi	
22	Umm Sallal Ali	Fahad Salem Al Marri	New
23	Al Khuraytiyat	Mohammed Dhafer Al Hajri	
24	Al Shahaniyah	Ali Khurbash Al Mansoori	New
25	Dukhan	Abdulla Muqlid Al Muraikhi	
26	Al Khour	Hassan Lahdan Al Mohannadi	New
27	Al Thakirah	Rasheed Srai Al Kabbi	New
28	Al Madinah Norte	Nasser Khalifa Alkuwari	New
29	Al Ghuwayriyeh	Mohammed Abdulla Al Sada	

Source: Ministry of Interior, Elections Department

## Conclusions

The seamless execution of these municipal elections demonstrates the commitment of Qatari authorities to conduct elections aligned with international standards, despite the fact that full breakdown of results are still to be published. However, the constrained powers afforded to the CMC—which primarily serves an advisory and lobbying role—significantly limit the impact of these elections compared to those of the SC. This results in a reduced level of citizen

engagement in this electoral process, evidenced by a declining participation rate despite increased voter registration.

Though the absence of published complete data hinders an in-depth comparative analysis, it is plausible that the diminished participation rate may be connected, in part, to the experiences from the inaugural SC elections held in 2021. Another noteworthy factor is the inability of women candidates to secure even a minimal representation in the CMC. This, coupled with the absence of female members among the 30 elected SC representatives, starkly highlights the challenges that tribal and patriarchal voting patterns pose for women striving to attain electoral success.

The election results reveal that voters primarily align their choices with tribal affiliations, notwithstanding the territorial delineation of districts. This contrasts with the voting patterns in the SC elections, where the tribal character of voting has been explicitly dictated by the electoral law itself. With the relatively new experience of electoral politics in Qatar, and the absence of political and ideological cleavages, tribal and communal allegiances still play – and will do so in a mid-long term – a major role in determining the election outcome.

#### **About the author**

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